

Mr. Ford's Page

WHEN men grew tired of waiting for the wind to blow, they invented something that would take its place. For sails they substituted steam engines. For windmills they substituted force pumps. There was no objection to the wind, but there was objection to waiting for it. Men wanted something they could start themselves. They could light a fire in the steam engine and make things go. They could work the pump handle and keep water flowing. They could start things.

That is really the mark of human progress, when men can start things going, without waiting for the usual natural currents to create a movement. Some men can think; that is, they can start their mind working, they can determine when and on what problem their mind shall go to work, quite regardless of mood or liking. But other men can only receive thoughts; they are recipients, not projectors. Their minds are open stretches over which plays now cloud, now sun; they take what impressions they receive; their minds are sensitive plates, not creative dynamos.

There has been a certain amount of control achieved in the material world, but until the same degree of control is achieved in the economic and social world, we can hardly be said to have made progress.

Men no longer wait for the wind to blow, but they "wait for business to start up again."

Men no longer depend on the wind-driven pump, but they still wait for "things to take a turn."

That is, in everything but mechanical power we are still in the primitive age of our fathers. We are still dependent on the whim of the wind. If it blows, we go; if it is calm, we stand still. We speak about "business" with something of the same tone of the inevitable that we use when speaking about the weather. Panics come like rainstorms, depressions like cloudy days, prosperity like "a bright spell," for all that human beings can do with regard to controlling these things.

The question is constantly becoming more and more pressing as to the amount of control that mankind can exercise over these matters.

As a matter of fact, the heart of the problem is just in that point. It is a human cause, whether you designate it ignorance or selfishness or what not—it is human. If it be mostly ignorance, the cure is in knowledge. If it be mostly selfishness, the cure is in social-mindedness.

But the one point to be clear about is that the cause is in humanity and not in outer Nature. If the Earth had at any time failed, the basis of human society would have been wrecked beyond repair. But there have been seed time and harvest continuously, and though there have been local crop failures, never has a failure occurred that would have prevented the whole world being satisfied if transportation conditions had been equal to the need. The Earth has always yielded enough to feed the people on it; the Earth goes on doing it year by year. Even with Central China and Eastern Europe starving, there is still enough food on the earth to feed the entire human race.

Now, we may use very high-sounding names to describe the activities which engage us during this life, but the one term which describes them all is "getting a living." And a living means food, clothing, shelter. Food means agriculture; clothing means manufacture; all three mean transportation. The basis of all is the Earth; it has never failed.

And yet it cannot be denied that as long as mankind regards its economic welfare as the effect of natural forces, now blowing toward prosperity and now toward depression, there is sufficient appearance of uncontrollable fate to give color to the supposition. If things are let alone to go down to zero, they do come back; and if things are let to rage along in a riot of prosperity with no thought of the future, they do come to a fall. There is just enough

to justify man's lazy supposition that "if it's to be, it's to be" and nothing that he can do can change the result.

There are economic laws, but who knows what they are? The bankers don't know. The men who would frame the laws so that a gold dollar would mean much more than a man's labor don't know. Nobody whose interest is merely himself, whose sense of prosperity ends with his own position or business, can possibly know what economic laws are. And that accounts for the various rules set up for finance and industry—wholly artificial rules—which pass as "laws," but which break down with sufficient frequency to prove that they are not even good guesses.

The basis of all economic reasoning is the Earth and its products. If these are present, you have the beginning. The process then becomes a simple use of what is on hand in order that it may reproduce itself in the necessities of life. To make the

yield of the Earth, in all its forms, large enough and dependable enough to serve as the basis for real life, the life which is more than eating and sleeping, is the highest service of any economic system.

Now, just there is probably where the sprout of the next development is to be looked for. We can make things—why, the problem of production is one of the most brilliant instances of human ingenuity. We can make any number of different sort of things by the millions. The material side of our life is splendidly provided for. There are enough processes and improvements now pigeon-holed and awaiting application, to bring the physical side of life to almost millennial completeness.

Then what's the trouble? Principally this: if we had advanced to a type of life which was not mainly material (although, of course, it would necessarily rest on a material basis), then our interest would naturally center there, and our only interest in the underlying material and economic processes would be to see that they worked right.

Just now, we are wrapped up in the things we are doing without being particularly concerned about the reasons why we do them. Our whole competitive system, our whole creative expression, all the play of our faculties are confined to one of the lower chambers of life, which is the chamber of material production and its by-products of success and the going standard of wealth. And it is regarded by some very short-sighted people as being to their interest that the present system never shall be perfect because it would interfere with

the narrow scope of rivalry which is now afforded. It is perfectly plain why the outlook upon a standardized economic world should fill some people with dismay because of its dullness.

No need as yet to fear the dullness of a world which is in perfect economic adjustment, for mankind will never consent to perfect adjustment until he finds in a higher sphere the same outlet he now finds in the lower sphere. There was a time when part of man's business was to make fires, and keep making fires; making fires was a career to him. Then came the time when higher interests claimed him, and he wanted a fire that would burn of itself without bothering him. Finally he put his fire downstairs in a furnace where he could not even see it and where it need not trouble him more than once a day. Lately he has been putting it farther away still, in a central power house where it doesn't bother him at all. And it is all the time becoming a more perfect fire. He has grown. He now wants only the products of the fire. He does not want imperfections in his fire to distract attention from his higher interests.

Just so with mankind; it will wholly solve the economic problem when it gets an interest higher than the economic problem. Any kind of life mankind may live needs bread. Therefore, in order to prevent the question of bread breaking into his higher interest, he will come to the point where he will agree that the whole bread question ought to be placed on a standard base.

IT IS only when we get a higher interest that we require of the lower activities that they do not bother us. Most of the perfection of control which we exercise in material matters is due to our desire to get quit of them, that we may apply ourselves to things that interest us. In that way the perfection of our economic system is to come—by getting an interest so much above it, that the economic system may be freed of its blemishes in order to free us of its bother. As long as materialism constitutes our chief sphere of action and interest, its very imperfections will serve ignorance, ambition or greed. But when our interests are elevated and purified, the economic sphere will be cleaned up, because it will not then be an end in itself, but a kitchen essential. The charm of a kitchen essential is that it gives no bother.